

**Testimony to the Appropriations Committee  
February 17, 2012  
Elizabeth Morgan, Director  
Middlesex Coalition for Children**

#### **CONTINUE FUNDING FOR THE FAMILY SCHOOL CONNECTION PROGRAM**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. My organization, the Middlesex Coalition for Children, represents 300 to 400 agencies and advocates working together to improve the lives of children in Middletown and Middlesex County.

The Children's Trust Fund's program, Family School Connection, owes a lot to Representative Gail Hamm, whose district includes parts of Middletown and East Hampton. A Middletown school was fortunate to be chosen as one of only 5 sites in the state to pilot this innovative program.

The program is an experiment. It transfers the principles of the Children's Trust Fund's signature program, the Nurturing Families Network, from families with very young children to families whose children are in elementary school. When children show signs of being in serious trouble, their families receive intensive home visiting services for as long as it takes to stabilize and improve the home situation.

The Middlesex Coalition for Children has been a member of Family School Connection's advisory board since the beginning. Participation in the program by families is of course voluntary, and early on many families were wary. Nor was the school entirely convinced by a program not run by school personnel. But Family School Connection has won acceptance and proved its value. It is a program that should be expanded, not eliminated.

The Middletown school that houses Family School Connection has been administering an emotional/behavioral health screen for the last three years. Over 20% of the entire student population screens positive – that is, at serious risk – a number that is in line with national estimates. That's about 75 students in this school. The school has one half-time social worker. The fact is, urban schools know that about a fifth of their students are in real trouble. But there has been nothing they can do about it. With Family School Connection, the children and families who are at the highest risk for the first time get the help and services they need.

Other testimony will address the evidence collected to date that Family School Connection is effective in improving child outcomes, and is cost effective in averting costly treatments and placements. What the Coalition has observed is that FSC fills a glaring gap in services, and that it is highly valued by school and families alike.

The Middletown school that houses FSC belongs in the "needs improvement" category that is being targeted by SDE for "turnaround". A program like FSC can make a critical contribution to turnaround – indeed it is doing so. The program, though small and still experimental, should – on the basis of our experience in Middletown – be continued and, if possible, expanded.

